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## Introduction

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### **Key words**

Empires, imperialism, charity, philanthropy,

### **Author Biography**

Julia McClure is a specialist of the global history of poverty and charity based at the University of Glasgow. She moved recently from an assistant professorship in global history at the University of Warwick. Special thanks are due to the Global History and Culture Centre and the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Warwick who funded the 2017 workshop that gave rise to this special edition.

### **Article**

Despite recent scandals in world-leading charities such as Oxfam (recently shaken by the “food for sex” revelations)<sup>1</sup> the amount of money donated to charity around the world continues to grow, with the chairman of the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) estimating that global charitable giving could rise to £146bn by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Data gathered by (CAF) indicates changing patterns in global giving, but no indications of decline.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to capture precise data on giving, but the available statistics indicate that the flow of money and resources through charitable institutions and networks is substantial. According to the UK charity commission,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43112200> (07.05.2018).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/global-charitable-giving-reach-146bn-2030-says-charities-aid-foundation-report/fundraising/article/1172356> (07.05.2018).

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/cafworldgivingindex2017\\_2167a\\_web\\_210917.pdf?sfvrsn=ed1dac40\\_10](https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/cafworldgivingindex2017_2167a_web_210917.pdf?sfvrsn=ed1dac40_10) (07.05.2018).

the estimated income of the UK voluntary sector in 2016 was £73.1 billion.<sup>4</sup> Data gathered by the Hudson Institute's Centre for Global Prosperity (CGP) on donations from the developed to developing world suggests that that in 2014 \$64 billion was spent on global philanthropy.<sup>5</sup> Despite this substantial charitable expenditure, the gap between rich and poor continues to increase, with the world's eight richest people having as much wealth as the poorest 50%.<sup>6</sup> Wealth has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a select group of individuals who set about trying to "change the world" through philanthropic giving.<sup>7</sup> This giving is not orientated towards distributional justice and it does not transform the socio-economic systems that create inequalities; the giver enhances their social standing and enjoys the tax benefits associated with charitable status and poor communities may have aspects of their poverty alleviated but do not overcome structural inequalities. This contemporary "philanthrocapitalism"<sup>8</sup> is reflective of new forms of wealth and power and their relationship on today's global stage, but the instrumentalisation of giving to establish spheres of influence

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<sup>4</sup> <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05428> (07.05.2018).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hudson.org/research/13314-index-of-global-philanthropy-and-remittances-2016> (07.05.2018).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2017-01-16/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world> (07.05.2018).

<sup>7</sup> The founder of Microsoft established the multi-billion "Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation" which seeks, among other things, to end malaria, and the founder of social-media giant Facebook recently invested \$3 billion to "cure all diseases". The CGP reported that private financial flows – including philanthropy, remittances, and private capital investment – continue to grow and surpass government aid"; <https://www.hudson.org/research/13314-index-of-global-philanthropy-and-remittances-2016> (07.05.2018).

<sup>8</sup> A term first coined by Matthew Bishop and Michael Green in *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World and Why we Should Let Them* (London: A. & C. Black, 2008). Linsey McGoeey has highlighted its dangerous implications in *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy* (London: Verso, 2015).

(within formal and informal empires) and realise an idealised world order has a far longer history. John H. Hanson has argued that “the persistence of this “gift economy” within advanced economies required cross-cultural analysis”.<sup>9</sup> Here we argue that it requires not only cross-cultural but also diachronic analysis.

Much of the cross-cultural analysis of the social meaning and power dynamics of giving has been informed by anthropology and centred on the importance of reciprocity<sup>10</sup> or, more recently, the creation of bonds of debt.<sup>11</sup> In these structuralist models, some of the cultural meanings of giving and their social and political implications, are lost. Within the Christian tradition *caritas*, charity, was developed as a theological virtue based upon love of self and others as a way of loving God. In medieval theology charity was understood as the manifestation of Christian love, a triangular relationship where love of self and love of neighbour were methodologies for love of God.<sup>12</sup> Charitable giving offered a pathway to salvation. Charitable giving became a spiritual and moral obligation, but as an act of self-love which also facilitated salvation it benefited the giver as much as the receiver and was not expected to transform the theologically ordained social hierarchy. While charity can be given between peers of the same socio-economic status, it is often given by richer groups to poorer, both maintain and creating power asymmetries. Charity was a pathway to salvation and it

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<sup>9</sup> John H. Hanson, “The Anthropology of Giving, Toward A Cultural Logic of Charity”, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 8:4, 501-520, 505.

<sup>10</sup> A field established by Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. By Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> David Graeber, *Debt, the first 5000 years* (New York: Melville House, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See Gert Melville ed., *Aspects of Charity, Concern for one's neighbour in medieval vita religiosa* (Berlin: Lit, 2011). Sven K. Knebal argues that a shift in the Christian concept of charity occurred in the seventeenth late seventeenth century, when love of self became less important and there was a separation between physical and moral being; see ‘Casuistry and the Early Modern Paradigm Shift in the Notion of Charity’, in Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen eds, *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 115 – 140.

underpinned a rapidly developing spiritual economy, which facilitated transactions between different forms of capital – economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual.<sup>13</sup> Within the dynamic spiritual economy of charity, economic giving could create social, political, cultural, and spiritual capital.

In the Middle Ages the development of financial institutions and concepts was entangled with the development of charitable institutions and theological institutions. Religious institutions, churches and monasteries, dominated the landscapes of medieval Europe and the Church became both one of the largest landowners and the most significant distributors of charity. The mendicant orders (religious orders based on voluntary poverty and sustenance through charitable donations) reflected transformations in the European economy in the late Middle Ages – urbanisation, monetarisation, and marketisation. They critiqued the wealth and power of the Church, but they contributed to the transformation rather than the erosion of the institutions and processes for the accumulation and consolidation of power through charitable giving. One mendicant Order in particular, the Franciscans, led the way and developed charitable micro-finance institutions, the *monte di pietà*, which offered cheap credit to the poor and aimed to undercut Jewish business practices. Forms of power and charity were constantly changing, but the symbiotic relationship between the two remained. The upheavals of the Reformation transformed forms of power and charity, but not the relationship between the two. During the sixteenth century, the Church's monopoly of charitable distribution and its socio-political and economic gains was contested by secular authorities within both Catholic and Protestant countries. Charitable practices, institutions and administrators diversified at the

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<sup>13</sup> The notion of symbolic and socio-cultural capital comes from Pierre Bourdieu. David Swartz has demonstrated how Bourdieu's theories of capital can be applied to the study of religion; David Swartz, "Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu's Political Economy of Symbolic Power", *Sociology of Religion*, 57: 1 (1996), 71-85.

same time that Europe expanded its power around the world and established the first global empires. Charitable institutions and practices blended spiritual and economic functions and developed a symbiotic relationship with empire.

It has long been understood that gifts, donations, or charity, are part of complex socio-political systems which mediate and construct asymmetrical power relationships. Hanson noted that “elite charity is primarily a means of social pacification”,<sup>14</sup> and Isabel dos Guimarães Sá observes that “it is generally admitted that charity did not limit itself to easing the suffering of the needy, but that it was also a powerful means for ensuring social order”.<sup>15</sup> Charitable giving decreases the likelihood of unrest in a situation of inequality, without challenging the nature of inequality. Charity increases the economic capital of the poor at the same time as increasing the social capital of the rich. It has been supposed that philanthropy was different to charity because charity targets the symptoms of poverty while philanthropy takes a more problem-based approach to target the long-term causes of poverty.<sup>16</sup> However, as Benjamin Soskis has observed, this distinction was proclaimed by protagonists of philanthropy and in fact the agenda and power dynamics of charity and philanthropy not so different.<sup>17</sup> Like charity, philanthropy re-inscribes power asymmetries, increasing the social capital of the giver while not transforming the systemic causes of inequality.

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<sup>14</sup> Hanson, “The Anthropology of Giving”, 502.

<sup>15</sup> dos Guimarães Sá, Isabel, “Catholic Charity in Perspective: The Social Life of Devotion in Portugal and its Empire (1450 – 1700)”, *e-journal of Portuguese History*, 2:1 (2004), 1-19., 5.

<sup>16</sup> Eric John Abrahamson, *Beyond Charity: A Century of Philanthropic Innovation* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.hudson.org/research/10723-both-more-and-no-more-the-historical-split-between-charity-and-philanthropy>

The transactions of charity do not only preserve social order, they create it. Charitable transactions are part of the fabric of empires. One of the early theorists of Europe's first global Empire, Francisco de Vitoria, contended that by taking the Amerindians into their care, the Spanish Crown's empire building in the Americas was "an act of charity".<sup>18</sup> This notion that empire was charity shaped the development of the Iberian Empires in the early modern period. On the site where Hernán Cortes, the conquistador of Mexico, met with the defeated Aztec Emperor Moctezuma, a charitable hospital was built. Charity was important to conceptualisation of the Iberian Empires as morally, spiritually, and legally legitimate, and charitable institutions helped mediate the formation of empires.

The first half of the articles in this volume explore the roles of charitable institutions in global empires that unfolded from the Iberian Peninsula in the early modern period. The volume begins with Regina Grafe who establishes a working definition of empire, "polities that extend power beyond the territory of original political legitimisation", and demonstrates how charity contributes to the imperial narrative of legitimation and has been 'a fundamental part of the repertoire of imperial practices'. Honing in on the question of legitimacy, Grafe establishes a more granulated and dynamic conception of empire and explains how charity has coordinated different imperial processes and linked different layers of power. Julia McClure offers an example of the roles of charity in the formation of the Spanish Empire by focusing in particular on the institution of the *Casa de Contratación* in the sixteenth century. McClure builds upon the definitions of the imperial functions of charity identified by Grafe, indicating how charity was a mechanism for maintaining social order, a strategy for establishing global Catholic communities across Empire, and part of a bargaining process for the negotiation of

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<sup>18</sup> Vitoria, 1960, 725, cited by Antony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination*, Studies in European and Spanish-American Political Theory 1513-1830 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 20.

power and resources within the asymmetrical relationships of empire. Sara Pinto focuses upon Misericórdias, known as the key charitable institutions of the Portuguese Empire, and demonstrates how they were used to move money and credit around the Empire. David Hitchcock focuses upon the British Empire in the seventeenth century, and draws attention towards the way forced labour was seen as form of charity and highlights how this ideological underpinning helped legitimate the penal transportation regime which developed to serve the needs of the British Empire.

The second half of articles in this special edition explore the different forms of empires that developed in modernity, and the ways in which charitable forms changed in tandem with economic transformations. The focus in these essays is on philanthropy, which is distinct from, but often informed by, charity. Philanthropy has Greek etymology meaning “love of people”, and the term becomes popular again from the seventeenth century. This second set of essays focus upon the different axes of inequality: gender, race, and class. Kirsten Kamphuis takes a gender history approach to the Dutch Empire in the nineteenth century and shows the role of charitable institutions – schools for girls – in colonisation and the construction of gender norms. Sarah Papazoglakis draws our attention to the racialisation of philanthropic giving in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. Papazoglakis begins her article by observing how “American philanthropy’s origins in racial dispossession are rarely considered a part of the history of racial uplift philanthropy”. Papazoglakis’s article uses the history of a black nineteenth-century female philanthropist to interrogate “the racialized and male-dominated structure of American philanthropy”. Toby Harper’s article demonstrates how, from the nineteenth century, the British Empire developed the honour system as a tool of philanthro-imperialism and concludes by indicating how this system continues today. Harper also draws our attention towards Indian traditions of philanthropy and the ways they were reshaped through colonial interactions. Finally, Caroline Reeves further extends our temporal, spatial,



and conceptual understanding of the historic relationship between empires and charity, exploring the historic roots of the West's philanthro-imperialism in China. Reeves contends that "we must overcome one of the last bastions of cultural imperialism: global giving". Her article highlights the West's ignorance and erasure of Chinese traditions of philanthropy indicating another of charity's imperial roles. This final essay emphasises the need for more global comparatives of systems of charity and their roles in establishing and maintaining differing social orders.

This special edition is setting a new research agenda, calling for more critical analysis of the relationship between charitable giving and empire formation. It asks us to deepen our analysis of the different functions of charitable giving and institutions, and the different economic, social, religious and moral dimensions of charity. While Karl Polanyi asked us to consider the socially embedded nature of the economy, this asks us to think more dynamically about the relationship between socio-cultural context and the economy, and to increase our understanding of the way in which religious concepts and institutions have shaped and continued to shape socio-economic landscapes. Jason Hickel and Arsalan Khan highlighted a contradiction in the logic of charity; "that the very process of accumulating enough profit to dispense charity is precisely the process that creates the problems that charity pretends to address".<sup>19</sup> This special edition calls for research that goes further in assessing the complex roles that charity has played in the construction, maintenance and negotiation of systems of inequality.

These articles deepen our understanding of the roles of charity in empire formations; they also bring tensions between structure and agency into focus and highlight and bring the struggles of the poor into focus. The poor were not objects controlled through the distribution

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<sup>19</sup> Jason Hickel and Arsalan Khan, "The Culture of Capitalism and the Crisis of Critique", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 84: 1 (2012), 203-227, 218.

of charity, but active subjects in dynamic and multidimensional systems of charity which they also manipulated.

The articles in this volume do not suggest any kind of genealogy of the relationship between empire and charity, but rather are chronologically ordered to highlight the insights of diachronic analysis. The articles in this special edition offer a trans-regional and trans-temporal analysis of the relationship between systems of charity and forms of empire. Despite their differences there are a number of reoccurring themes. They indicate how systems of gift giving are culturally embedded and mediate complex exchanges of economic, social, political, and cultural capital. Further, systems of charity have been a mechanism for transcending distances: the social distances between distinct groups in unequal societies, and the spatial distances of a rapidly globalising world. Just as *Misericórdias* facilitated connectivity and movement of financial resources around the unprecedented distances of the early modern Portuguese empire, so today's international aid industry connects the lives of the world's poor with potential rich benefactors. As the rich and poor are brought into contact sites of struggle are created; understanding the mechanisms and manipulations of these struggles is important if charitable giving can ever be a strategy for reducing asymmetries of power and resources around the world.